THE ACADEMY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

a n d

THE BIALIK INSTITUTE

THE HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

a plan by

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מאמר לקראת הגשת תכנית

The Academy of the Hebrew Language in Jerusalem has, since its foundation[1], concentrated its activities mainly in the realm of lexicography. It has compiled and published handy dictionaries in various fields but in particular in the various branches of the technical sciences. Such activity was dictated by the needs of the developing Hebrew Language which has once more become a spoken tongue by the Jewish people living in Eretz Israel. Since 1936, the lexicographical activities of the Academy have been supported by the Bialik Institute of the Jewish Agency.

Some years ago, the Academy of the Hebrew Language and the Bialik Institute decided to launch the enterprise known as "The Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language" in addition to "The Dictionary of the Language of the Bible". While the preparation of the latter is being conducted under the guidance of Professor N.H. Tur-Sinai, President of the Academy, the writer of the following pages has been entrusted with the task of directing the preparations for the "Historical Dictionary" which is now in progress.

The following pages which were submitted on 2/1/1959 to the Academy and approved as a basis for the preparatory work of the Dictionary, are intended to draw attention to the problems involved in the preparation of such a Dictionary and to the methods that have been adopted. This proposal was drawn up following a thorough investigation of the structure of similar

Dictionaries of the languages, especially of Indo-European languages, and after examining the methods adopted by similar lexicographical enterprises.

Z. B. H.

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1) Founded in the year 1889 under the name "Committee of the Hebrew Language" and constituted in 1954 by the Keneset as "The Academy of the Hebrew Language".

THE HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

A. The Nature of the Dictionary

Dictionaries, and even scientific dictionaries, are generally compiled for various specific purposes which determine their structure and the scope of their documentation. The scientific dictionaries of the Hebrew language are generally of the explanatory type. That is to say, they have been compiled for the purpose of assisting the understanding of texts. Indeed, the names of dictionaries current in Hebrew today and those that have often been suggested in the course of the deliberations of the Academy, for example: "A Dictionary of the Language of the Bible", "A Dictionary of Tannaitic Literature", "A Dictionary of Liturgical Poetry", etc., show that such compilations are intended for the presentation of the language of various texts rather than for the presentation of a linguistic unit defined from the purely historical point of view. For the Bible does not present a uniform linguistic unit and does not include all the extant texts dating back to the Biblical period, just as during the period when the literature known as Tannaitic Literature was written, there was current not only the Tannaitic idiom but also another idiom which generally appears to be closer to the language of the Bible than is that of the Tannaim. Dictionaries of the type mentioned are, therefore, media for philological ends, namely the understanding of a certain category of texts. For that reason, one naturally finds therein a rather extensive treatment of obscure "passages" as

well as of hapax legomena out of all proportion to the place of such elements in the language of these sources as a whole. The author of a dictionary of the language of the Bible, for example, pays attention to every difficult passage or to the various attempts to explain such words as מְאֻנִּים, צֳמִּים, בְּעִים (רוחו) , and does not feel himself called upon to expatiate on the use of ordinary words such as אני-אנכי , or למה in the meaning of פן, from the point of view of the local and temporal origin of the various books of the Bible.

True, there is a type of dictionary which serves as an end in itself, that being linguistic, namely a presentation of the vocabulary of a certain language whether from the geographical (such as dictionaries of various dialects), the historical, or any other point of view. If a dictionary of this type intends to present a language of the past and is based entirely on written texts, these texts serve only as a source. Obviously, such dictionaries must not overlook obscure and doubtful passages and hapax legomena, but deal with them briefly, in proportion to their importance in the overall picture of the language of those texts.

Hence it follows that a clear definition of the nature of the proposed dictionary must precede any practical work in its preparation, not only as regards the work of editing but also as regards the collecting of the material. Any person engaged in such a dictionary must, when gathering material from the sources, and certainly when sifting the material gathered for the purpose of introducing it in the dictionary, have before his eyes the purpose that the dictionary is to serve. The dictionary we have in mind -

and I take it we are all agreed on this matter - will be a Dictionary of the Hebrew Language on historical principles, which is not a means to an end but an end in itself, that being a presentation of the stock of Hebrew words from the earliest beginnings down to a certain period.

Furthermore, even within the limits of the present paper, we must clarify an additional point and decide upon it, in order that the work of preparing the material for such a dictionary may be done with a clear end in view.

Despite the numerous consultations of the Editorial Board, it has not yet been definitely established whether the "Historical Dictionary" shall be a combination of various "Period Dictionaries" that are independent works in themselves[1], or whether it should be one comprehensive dictionary embracing all the periods from the inception of the language down to a certain time. On the face of it, this is a purely technical matter with little bearing on the preparatory stage and the gathering of the material for the Dictionary in one of the two forms mentioned. Indeed, I was of that opinion for many years, but I now realize that this is not the case. While engaging in the gathering of the material, we must already have a clear knowledge as to which of these two forms of dictionary we have in mind, for "Period Dictionaries" necessitate a wider documentation and an exhausting of the linguistic material from all the sources relating to the period, or at least one as full as possible. On the other hand, one comprehensive dictionary,

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1) cfr.: W.A. Craigie, New Dictionary Schemes Presented to the Philological Society, April 4th 1929 (Transactions etc. 1925 - 30 pp. 6ff.), as well as: The Value of the Period Dictionaries (Transactions etc. 1937 pp. 52-62).

while it must be based on a very wide range of material, must renounce completeness, which is indeed not required for a presentation of the history of the stock of Hebrew words in their overall development.

It would appear to me that we must decide on one comprehensive historical dictionary to embrace all periods. Not only has the lack of such a work been most deeply felt, but it may also serve as an excellent basis for the preparation of special Period Dictionaries at some later date. Lexicographical work in English has developed along these lines. It is on this assumption, therefore, that the following remarks have been written.

B. The Foundations and Scope of the Dictionary

a. In dictionaries running into numerous volumes, which are published over a period of many years, one can always sense tangible differences between the first volume (or volumes) and the last volumes, differences which generally impair the uniformity of the work as a whole. Insofar as such differences are the result of new achievements in research, the revelation of new facts or new concepts, not only can not be avoided, but they must not be avoided, for each additional volume must necessarily be the last word at the time of its publication. However, one can prevent differences impairing the uniformity of a work in the sphere of documentation. It is to this that the authors of various and important dictionaries have not paid sufficient attention betimes. For the sake of uniformity of material, one must fix a date-line beyond which no fresh

material is admitted to the dictionary, and anything cropping up after such a date is left for the supplementary volumes or for a new edition of the dictionary. This must certainly be the guiding principle for a dictionary which is a permanent enterprise, a work which will always be in preparation, a dictionary for which no sooner has the collection of material for a certain edition been completed, than one begins collecting material for supplementary volumes or for a succeeding edition. I propose fixing the year 1947 as the last date for the collection of material for the basic edition of the Historical Dictionary. The year 1948 marks a turning-point in the history of the Hebrew language, for in that year it returned to full political life, and one need not dilate on this subject here. This date-line does not imply that the collection of material from the year 1947 onwards must be relegated to some later period. On the contrary, it is desirable - if a budget is available - to engage in such work concurrently so that it be ready and in the hands of the Editorial Board on the completion of the basic edition of the dictionary.

b. I am of the opinion that we must regard the "Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language" as a permanent enterprise and not as a one time undertaking, although such work may take many years to accomplish. It is from this viewpoint that we must compile the entry-cards according to such a system as makes it possible for us to maintain this card-index up-to-date and ready for use. One may compare it to a card-index catalogue of a library that grows with the increasing stock of books in the library, and is always up-to-date.

c. Having decided on the nature of the Dictionary, and having decided to turn it into a permanent enterprise over generations to come, we must first of all fix its basis and scope before embarking on a collection of the material for the two purposes.

It would undoubtedly be ideal to base the Dictionary on all the written texts in Hebrew, beginning from the ancient documents in the Bible, and on all the early epigraphic material down to publications as far as the end of 1947. The use of all written material during this period for the purpose of compiling the Dictionary would necessitate the reading of books and the marking of entries into cards by an appreciable number of people over scores of years, and the writing up of the material and the editing it in book form becomes so distant a goal that the enthusiasm even of those who are not urging a speedy completion of the work may be damped. If we add to this the textual problems of very many sources, the attainment of the goal would become still more distant. I believe that we must decide beforehand that the basic edition of our Dictionary should be founded on only part of the texts, but such as are fully representative of the whole gamut of Hebrew linguistic creation. If, for example, there are about thirty thousand literary units[1] written in Hebrew, we must base the Dictionary on about

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[1] The term, "literary unit" is used in order to avert the misunderstanding that the word "book" would give rise to. Is the Talmud as a whole one "book" or six "books" according to the six Orders of the Mishna, or is each tractate of the Talmud a book in itself? The same applies to any one poem of a writer, which has sometimes been published separately and sometimes has been included in a collection of poems by the same person. According to Friedenberg's "Beth 'Eqed Sefarim" I have counted 28,500 units. But this catalogue includes also works not written in Hebrew, but printed in Hebrew characters, and does not include works that have not appeared in print and are still preserved in manuscript. The dictionary must take cognisance also of works not yet published, which could easily be obtained from the Institute for Microfilms of Hebrew Manuscripts, attached to the Ministry of Education and Culture.

twelve thousand such units which shoud be chosen strictly according to certain criteria to be laid down. The figures given above are tentative only and not intended to fix any prineiples.

d. I take the liberty of mentioning several criteria for the choice of the "literary units". Obviously the members of the Editorial Board, each an expert in his own field, will have to give special consideration to this problem. The basic material should include:

1. The important works in every generation, which have wielded great influence on the nation and on the Hebrew language during succeeding generations. This can be established to a certain extent technically, for these will necessarily be works that have run into numerous editions in the course of generations and the Dictionary cannot ignore them.

2. Works which are not important in themselves, from the literary or any other point of view, but which fill a gap from the historical point of view, that is from the point of view of the history of the language. For we must aspire to it that each word or expression shall have in the Dictionary at least one documentation within a span of 100 years if not less than that (whenever possible, of course) in ancient times; and at least one documentation in a span of 30 years from the Haskalah period (18th Century) and onwards;

3. Works of the type mentioned in paragraph 2, which may contribute to the knowledge of a local idiom. Such aspect, it would appear, has so far merited little attention. I mean that one

must include in the basic material works written in various countries of the Jewish Diaspora, in order to illustrate the use of the Hebrew language in these countries, in which the spoken language of the Jews differed. In such instances, one must include works which are not important in themselves, such as, for example, a book of Responsa, which is not of intrinsic value and is not famous, in order that one may include documentation drawn therefrom in the Dictionary.

4. Works reflecting various stylistic standards in one generation, such as Juridical language (including the language of the Halacha and laws and regulations issued by various communities) the language of story and narrative, poetry, liturgical literature, etc.

e. The choice of these "literary units" should be made at least with the aid of the members of the Editorial Board who are experts in various fields, if it is impossible for each of them to undertake to present a list of the units in his own particular field.

f. A "List of Sources" should be prepared setting forth the literary units that the Editorial Board agreed to include in the "basic material". Such a list must include the following data:

1. Names of works and their authors in chronological order. For practical reasons, I suggest that each author be given an ordinal number, as is the case in the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae.

2. Abbreviations of names of works to be included in the entry-

cards.

3. Mention of the edition or manuscript of any work that the Dictionary generally bases itself on, and the edition or manuscript that must be compared for the purpose of establishing the correct reading of the text.

4. A statement as to whether quotations from the work in question will be taken by "mechanical registration" or by "registration by selection". (This is, of course, important if it should be decided to introduce the system employed by Thesaurus Linguae Latinae).

The"List of Sources" which sets forth the foundations of the Dictionary should be published in the form of a booklet and time should be allowed for scholars in the various branches of Hebrew literature to give their opinion of it and to suggest amendments. On the elapse of the date-line, the Editorial Board shall consider all the questions raised by the list and arrive at a final decision.

g. It is according to this list that the reading of the "literary units" and the entries on the cards shall be made. It is necessary, of course, that the reading of the works shall be entrusted to many people, to an unlimited number of people in fact, whether they be paid readers or volunteers. The choice of readers should be governed by the data contained in the "List of Sources": sources which have no reliable editions or the texts of which require special preparation for the Dictionary, shall be read only by specialists in the field. And it is they who shall mark the

material requiring entry on the cards. The copy serving as a basis for the material included in the Dictionary shall remain at the disposal of the Editorial Board for study and reference whenever need arises.

(It should be remembered that the preparation of the "List of Sources" with us is not a task which can be regarded as mainly technical, but is a scientific work in itself. I have in mind, in particular, all the period down to the 10th Century and certain tipes of literature beyond this period, for a considerable part of the sources are anonymous and there are differences of opinion in regard to the date of their creation and, in certain cases, also in regard to their place of creation. For that reason the work of preparation of such a "List of Sources" will take a considerable time before we can make use of the works and enter them on to the cards.)

h. Simultaneously with the preparation of the "List of Sources" one should prepare also a "List of Lemmas", which I would call the Scope of the Dictionary.

I take it that all the members of the Editorial Board will agree that this comprehensive Dictionary has no room for merely technical terms which were not in general use, or for mere neologism proposed by individuals which were not, or generally not, in use in the language. The place of such words is in specialized dictionaries. Of course, one must apply a different criterion for the language in ancient times than for the language of the period closer to our own. This is not the time to consider the criteria

to be applied for the inclusion or exclusion of words. I shall seek an opportunity of making suggestions in this respect on some more fitting occasion. One must, therefore, fix all the lemmas of the Dictionary for which documentation will be sought after the "List of Sources" has been prepared. It is clear of course that in the preparation of the "List of Lemmas", numerous linguistic problems will arise, such as that of the spelling and vocalization to be adopted in the Dictionary for the lemmas; the fixing of the order of words which are alike in spelling but different in vocalization as for example, חָרַשׁ חֶרֶשׁ חֹרֶשׁ חֵרֵשׁ ; which Aramaic words are to be included in the Hebrew dictionary; etc. - problems that are likely to occupy the meetings of the Academy and of the Committee on Hebrew Grammar for a considerable time. Existing dictionaries should serve as a basis for the preparation of the list.

i. It would appear that only after the "List of Lemmas" is prepared will it be possible to begin listing the bibliography relating to the various items, for the listing of the bibliography must conform to the lemmas. True, all forms of spelling of the words will be given in the Dictionary, and each in its proper alphabetic order, but all the quotations, including those of words of different spelling, must be brought together under the lemma, the spelling of which is normalized. For example, if it should be decided that the spelling of the words תפס, פסיעה, סטה, סרטט, שרה, תכסיס, קנטר etc. is adopted for the lemmas, then all the quotations, even such where the above-mentioned words appear under the spelling שרטט, שטה, פשיעה, תפש, סררה, טכסיס, קנתר will be

given under the items סרטס, סטה etc. whereas the words שרטס, שטה etc. will be entered in their proper alphabetic order but will have cross-references to the lemmas. This, of course, is essentially a technical rather than a linguistic matter, and for that reason it will not give rise to great differences of opinion. But here we touch upon a much more serious question, decidedly linguistic in nature, because it is no longer one of spelling alone, particularly not so in regard to the language of the present generation and to the pronunciation which is regarded as standard. The question boils down to this: let's take such words as

ארגון:ארגמן, אונאה:הונאה, אגדה:הגדה, היכן:איכן, התאכל:התעכל,

כעור:כאור, אומד:עומד, פרבר:פרור, כרסם:קרסם, טכס:טקס, איצטדין:אסטדין,

טפוס:דפוס, פרדליס:ברדליס, מרקוליס:מרקוריס, סבטיון:סמבטיון,

שואבה:שאובה. Will each word in the above pairs be regarded as a separate word and so appear in the Dictionary as a distinct entry and carry with it its own quotations, or should these pairs be regarded as one word in its historical and local variations, and hence be given under one entry together with all the relevant quotations? We must answer this serious question before beginning the preparation of the card-index. I think, however, that we can begin a consideration of this question only after we have the "List of Lemmas" for the latter will present us with all the material requiring consideration and decision.

At first sight, I think it would be good if we established the identity of each word in its historical process according to its meaning. By so doing, we should be able to unite under one

entry, everything that is really identical from the point of view of meaning and content, but has changed in the course of time whether in spelling or in pronounciation by various Jewish communities. Such a method will also help us to overcome the really difficult problem in that a certain word, in a certain source and context, appears in different forms in various manuscripts and editions, as given above. However, I am not making any suggestions here as to a solution of the problem. I am only raising points worthy of consideration, for the matter requires serious and minute examination. At any rate, the mentioning of this problem shows that the preparation of the "List of Lemmas" in advance is indispensable for a systematic preparation of the Dictionary. Experience in other undertakings has shown how necessary it is to prepare beforehand a list of lemmas and that one must not rely on what will emerge while the compilation of the dictionary is in process. All editors of dictionaries with whom I have talked stressed the fact that wherever they had not a properly prepared list of lemmas in front of them, they found it most difficult, as time went on, to find their way through the maze of cards of entries which had not been arranged in accordance with a list of lemmas fixed in advance, with the result that numerous entries escaped the attention of the editor when engaged on certain items.

I suggest including in the Dictionary an idex of words arranged according to their formations and word patterns (mishqalim), for this will be a weighty contribution to the historical morphology of our language. One should perhaps pay attention to this question

before beginning a preparation of the "List of Lemmas". Otherwise, a clarification will be necessary of various basic problems in Hebrew grammar before drawing up the Dictionary because no good scientific dictionary is imaginable without a basically clear grammatical "ideology".

The two branches of activity mentioned above: that of laying the foundations for the dictionary ("List of Sources") and fixing its scope ("List of Lemmas") must precede any other work on the Dictionary. Insofar as the work is comprehensive and is done with minute care, the task of building up the entry-cards and a card-index of the bibliography will be made easier.

C. The Card-Index of the Dictionary

I do not intend making any concrete proposals at present regarding the structure of the card-index, because I am of the opinion that when the two above-mentioned branches of activity are carried through, and they are necessarily preparatory to the work of the Dictionary proper, it is worth while investigating whether we can employ automation, that is to say, making use of punched card machines or electronic computers. From the publications of Professor Roberto Busa, head of the Centro per l'Automazione dell' Analisi Letteraria in Gallarate (Italy), founded in 1956, which, as far as I know, is the first of its kind in the world, and from other publications, one gathers that much advancement has been made in the use of machines for lexicographical purposes so that the prospects of making use of them for Hebrew lexicography have

increased. Furthermore, an attempt has also been made to employ machines for Hebrew lexicographical work, for a Concordance of the Dead Sea Scrolls is at present being prepared at the above-mentioned Centre. I believe that an institution like the Academy of the Hebrew Language, which is about to compile a card-index for the Historical Dictionary in the year 1958, and perhaps not necessarily for this work alone, cannot embark on the project without making a thorough examination of the possibilities inherent in these new systems. Of course, if solutions should be found for all the problems inherent in the preparation of a card-index of this nature for an Indo-European language, it is still necessary to solve various problems arising in connection with the Hebrew language which is different in structure from Indo-European languages.

If it should transpire however, that this new method does not comply with our needs, we shall not of course hold up our work, but follow the system till now employed in enterprises like our own. I wish, therefore, to put forward various ideas in regard to the card-index if we should decide not to employ automation:

a. It will be necessary to employ the two methods in vogue in the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae: "mechanical registration" and "registration by selection". "Registration by selection" in Hebrew necessitates a high standard of reader of sources, at least in regard to various classes of literature down to the 18th Century. It is therefore much more desireable to employ "mechanical registration". But even the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, which has at its disposal a wider staff than we would have for the time being, and

of course a much more limited scope of literature serving as a basis for its work, employed this method only for 30% of the sources.

b. It is advisable to prepare the entry-cards by making use of printed forms so as to reduce the number of errors in copying, and at any rate whatever copying is required, it should be typewritten.

c. The entry-card should include a self-contained passage from the point of view of subject matter, so that the editor will not have to consult the source from which the card has been prepared. Generally, the editor does not consult sources but only entry-cards after they have been checked as to accuracy.

d. At least that part of the card-index which has been prepared according to the "mechanical registration" must be arranged according to two principles: 1. According to the general alphabetical order of the Dictionary, for purposes of the Dictionary; and 2. according to alphabetical order within the scope of the source from which the cards have been drawn up. By way of example, cards drawn up from the Sifre or from Bialik's "Safiach" should be arranged according to the general alphabetical order of the Dictionary and should also be preserved in special card-indexes for the Sifre or Bialik's "Safiach", also in alphabetical order. The purpose of this second arrangement is to preserve this material also for various linguistic monographs, whether in the lexicographical field or in any other field, because under the system of "mechanical registration", if each card consisting, say, of 100

words is mimeographed in 100 copies, it can very easily be printed in 200 copies without appreciable additional cost, for the purpose of compiling a parallel card-index of the language of various sources or of certain authors.

e. In all probability one can for the time being do without a card-index of entries from the Bible, because we have authoritative Concordances of the Bible. On the other hand, one must include in the card-index all the Greek and Latin transcriptions of the Books of the Bible and all the vocalizations of Biblical texts whether according to the Tiberian system or other systems.

f. In these card-indexes shall be entered also the proper names of the sources irrespective of whether they will be included in the Dictionary or not, so that they shall be preserved for a separate work. The question whether proper names shall be included in the Dictionary requires special consideration and decision. (Cfr for example, Introduction to the Supplementary Volume of the OED of the year 1933, p.V).

Finally I should like to make it clear once more that this plan does not touch upon the principles of editing nor does it consider regulations governing the work of the editors because we are as yet far off from that stage and it were better to consider this item in the light of experience gathered during the various preparatory stages touched upon in this plan. When the time comes, I shall take the liberty of making proposals in this matter.

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